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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3830
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9973
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1931
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005646

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SUBJECT: DEFENSE MINISTER PLEDGES NO INTERFERENCE IN
ELECTIONS

REF: BANGKOK 5600

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Defense Minister Boonrawd Sontas told the Ambassador that the Thai military is committed to not interfering in the coming political campaign and that the Council for National Security could dissolve as it has no role to play at this point. Boonrawd stated his hope that the Burmese regime understands that there is an opportunity to resolve the situation in Burma through dialogue. End Summary.

BURMA

12. (C) In a November 1 call on Minister of Defense General Boonrawd Sontas, the Ambassador told Boonrawd his decision to cancel his visit to Burma was correct, as the U.S. believes that all countries should keep their contacts with the Burmese military to an absolute minimum. (Note. Boonrawd planned to visit Burma at the same period as the recent violent crackdown but canceled when the Burmese regime cracked down on the opposition. End note.) Boonrawd expressed his hope that the Burmese regime is at a point where it will recognize that the use of force is not the answer to the situation in Burma and that dialogue with all parties is the way to solve the crisis. Special Envoy Gambari's visit to Burma is an opportunity for the Burmese regime to demonstrate that it is willing to work with all parties, including Aung San Suu Kyi, monks, and minority groups, Boonrawd said.

13. (C) The Ambassador stressed that USG policy on Burma should be seen as a signal of support for the Burmese people's desire for democracy and asked about RTG thinking on the situation in Burma. Boonrawd described the difficulties that the RTG faces due to the long Thai-Burmese border, the large number of illegal Burmese immigrants living in Thailand, and pressure from the Burmese government for the RTG to do something about Burmese activists. Despite these challenges, the RTG is trying to accelerate the transfer of power to a democratic government in Burma through political and economic development. Burmese transition to democracy as an accepted member of the international community is of primary concern to the Thai government. The RTG will watch Special Envoy Gambari's upcoming visit closely to judge the

intentions of the Burmese regime.

CNS ACTIVITIES AND THE ELECTION

14. (C) The Ambassador stressed to the Minister that, with elections formally scheduled, the military should not be involved in shaping the political environment. Any perception of military plans to interfere in election processes, such as the Council for National Security (CNS) documents discussing the strategies to discredit the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party (PPP), runs the risk of casting the election as illegitimate. Boonrawd said military had endeavored to illustrate to the public the damage that Thai Rak Thai policies had brought upon Thailand, and that PPP would bring corruption and abuses of power back to the country. Thailand is now at a point in the political process that this Royal Thai Army effort was no longer necessary, Boonrawd explained.

15. (C) The Ambassador asked Boonrawd to comment on the recent comments by Royal Thai Supreme Commander General Boonsrang Niampradit that the CNS no longer has a role to play and should dissolve. With the political campaign beginning soon, the Ambassador said dissolution of the CNS would be a positive signal that the military does not plan to interfere in the elections. Boonrawd said he agrees with Boonsrang that the CNS lacks a role and should therefore dissolve.

16. (C) Boonrawd described the October 30 decision by the Thai Cabinet to lift martial law in all but 179 primarily border districts as a signal of the RTG's commitment to free

BANGKOK 00005646 002 OF 002

and fair elections. Security problems, such as narcotics trafficking and illegal immigration, in the districts that will remain under martial law substantiate the need for the law to remain in those areas. The Ambassador said a complete lifting of martial law would be another positive signal.

GRIPEN FIGHTER PLANE DECISION

17. (C) The Ambassador told Boonrawd that we had hoped that the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) would have chosen the F-16 to replace Thai F-5 aircraft. Despite disappointment with the RTAF decision to buy the Swedish SAAB Gripen, we look forward to working with the RTAF to address munitions requirements for the Gripen and believe the Mid-Life Update to existing RTAF F-16s is still the best choice to meet the fighter aircraft requirements in the future. Boonrawd said he had no role in the decision, which had been made by the RTAF.

COMMENT

18. (C) Boonrawd did not deny the existence of the CNS documents or the activities described therein; this lends credence to the charges that the CNS did indeed have a media plan to "educate" the public about choosing "the right" candidates in the coming election. Boonrawd said the right things on election issues, but he has had little apparent influence during his term as minister. We will continue to raise these concerns with our military interlocutors.
BOYCE